



Media Statement by Bench Marks Foundation For Immediate Release [27 July 2009]

Richtersveld sets shining example

The Bench Marks Foundation has commended the Richtersveld Mining Community on the West Coast of South Africa for its high level of organisation and work ethic, factors which helped the community successfully challenge mining company Alexkor in a court battle over a claim of land.

This is one of several issues that were highlighted at the launch of Bench Marks Foundation's latest study in Johannesburg today. Bench Marks is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on sustainability, economic development and empowerment.

Despite this successful court battle, however, the community of Richtersveld in the West Coast may not be able to reap the fruits of its decade-long court battle as the diamond deposits in the area are all but exhausted.

The study, titled *Corporate Social Responsibility in the Diamond Mining Industry on the West Coast of South Africa*, says that "the people in Richtersveld show a clear desire to uplift and develop communities of Port Nolloth and Hondeklip Bay."

Part of this high level of organisation is demonstrated in the way the community challenged state mining company, Alexkor. The people of Richtersveld brought a claim for land restitution against Alexkor in the Land Claims court which was initially rejected in 2001.

A successful appeal was then made to the Supreme Court of Appeal and resulted in the ruling that the Richtersveld community had a right to restitution.

Regrettably, however, it may be all to no avail, said John Capel, chief executive of Bench Marks.

"In spite of their spirited efforts, the people of Richtersveld may not be able to reap the rewards since alluvial diamond mining in Alexander Bay has come to a standstill and Alexkor, like De Beers is shifting its focus from alluvial diamond mining to marine mining," he said.

"In terms of the Deed of Settlement the land mining rights will be transferred to the community, whilst the marine mining rights stay with Alexkor.

“Alexkor and the Richtersveld Mining Community will form a pooling and sharing joint venture (PSJV), which is an unincorporated venture that will oversee all the mining activities in future,” the study says.

Richtersveld community is made up of the towns of Eksteenfontein, Buboos and Vioolsdrift. Alexkor is the main mining company operating in this area. However said Capel, this situation is far better than Port Nolloth where De Beers operates. Here the communities are apathetic, feel completely disempowered and suffer general lethargy, substance abuse and high levels of unemployment. To really measure the impact of CSR, communities must be able to demonstrate a sense of hope and witness meaningful changes in their circumstances.

This Bench Marks Foundation research on the diamond industry on the South African West Coast is a continuation of the broader SADC research initiative into the extractive industry. The main focus is CSR practice of mining companies regarding the three basic dimensions of sustainable development – economical, social and environmental – in the areas in which they operate.

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Issued by Quo Vadis Communications on behalf of Bench Marks Foundation

Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on sustainable practices and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks’ agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies’ operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.

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